In the Matter of the Route Permit Application by Northern States Power Company for the Kohlman Lake to Goose Lake 115 kV Transmission Line Project in Ramsey County, Minnesota

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SCOPING DECISION
PUC DOCKET NO. E002/TL-12-1151

The above matter has come before the deputy commissioner of the Department of Commerce (Department) for a decision on the scope of the environmental assessment (EA) to be prepared for the Kohlman Lake to Goose Lake 115 kV transmission line project proposed by Northern States Power Company.

Project Description
Xcel Energy proposes to replace an existing single circuit 115 kV transmission line with a new double circuit 115 kV line between the Kohlman Lake substation and the Goose Lake substation in northeast Ramsey County. The proposed route for the project is approximately 2.8 miles in length and follows an existing transmission line and railroad corridor. The new double circuit 115 kV line will be built, to the extent possible, on the same alignment as the existing line which it will replace.

Xcel Energy is requesting a 200 foot route width for the project. Xcel Energy proposes to use existing rights-of-way for the majority of the project and new right-of-way in two locations. In the areas where new right-of-way is necessary, Xcel Energy is proposing a right-of-way (easement) of 75 feet for the project. In addition to the new double circuit 115 kV line, the Kohlman Lake and Goose Lake substations will be modified and new equipment installed. All modifications will occur within the existing footprint of the substations.

Xcel Energy indicates in its route permit application that as the project utilizes existing transmission line right-of-way, it did not consider other route alternatives.

Purpose
Xcel Energy indicates in its route permit application that the project is needed to meet North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) planning standards. Electrical loads in northeast Ramsey County are served generally from three sources – the Chisago County, Kohlman Lake, and Riverside substations. Absent the proposed project, an outage at one of these substations would result in the inability to maintain electrical service in the area. The new double circuit 115 kV line will provide a redundant power source such that electrical service can be maintained should an outage occur.

Regulatory Background
A route permit application for the project was filed by Xcel Energy on January 17, 2013, and accepted as complete by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) on March 15, 2013. The route permit application will be reviewed under the alternative permitting process,

pursuant to the Power Plant Siting Act (Minnesota Statues 216E) and Minnesota Rules 7850.2800 to 7850.3900.

Scoping Process

Scoping is the first step in the alternative permitting process after application acceptance. The scoping process has two primary purposes: (1) to ensure that the public has a chance to participate in determining what routes and issues are studied in the EA, and (2) to help focus the EA on impacts and issues important to a reasoned route permit decision. This scope identifies potential human and environmental issues that will be addressed in the EA. The scope also presents an anticipated schedule of the environmental review process.

Public Scoping Meeting

Commission and Department staff held a joint public information and environmental assessment scoping meeting on April 23, 2013, in White Bear Lake, Minnesota. The meeting provided members of the public an opportunity to learn about the proposed project and the state's permitting process, ask questions, provide comments, and identify potential impacts and route alternatives to be considered in the scope of the environmental assessment. Four members of the public attended the meeting. One citizen expressed concern about the electric and magnetic fields that would be produced by the project. Another citizen, a representative from the Metropolitan Council, related concerns of the Council regarding wastewater sewers in the project area.

Public Comments

A comment period, ending on May 10, 2013, provided the public an opportunity to submit comments to Department staff on issues and route alternatives for consideration in the scope of the EA. Three comment letters were received by the close of the comment period.

The Metropolitan Council commented that Xcel Energy's proposed route runs very near existing wastewater sewers ("interceptors"), and requested that Xcel Energy coordinate with the Council on placement of new transmission line structures.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) commented that a threatened species – the Blanding's Turtle – is present in the project area and that mitigative measures should be taken to protect this species. The DNR also noted that a license to cross public lands and waters may be required for the project.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) commented that road crossing permits, consistent with MnDOT's utility accommodation policy, would be required for the project. MnDOT requested that Xcel Energy coordinate with MnDOT staff on final design of all crossings. MnDOT also noted that Highway 61 is a house moving route and that appropriate transmission line clearances would be required to accommodate this purpose.

Scoping comments are available for viewing on the Department's energy facilities permitting website at: http://mn.gov/commerce/energyfacilities/Docket.html?Id=33013 and on the eDockets website at: https://edockets.state.mn.us/EFiling/search.jsp (enter "12" for year and "1151" for number).

Commission Review
On May 28, 2013, Department staff provided the Commission with a summary of the EA scoping process. The summary indicated that Department staff would be recommending to the deputy commissioner of the Department that the scoping decision for the project include only that route proposed by Xcel Energy in its route permit application for evaluation in the EA. On June 20, 2013, the Commission considered what action, if any, it should take with respect to the route alternatives to be considered in the EA; the Commission took no action.

HAVING REVIEWED THE MATTER, consulted with Department staff, and in accordance with Minnesota Rule 7850.3700, I hereby make the following scoping decision:

MATTERS TO BE ADDRESSED

The issues outlined below will be identified and described in the environmental assessment (EA) for the proposed Kohlman Lake to Goose Lake project. The EA will describe the project and the human and environmental resources of the project area. It will also provide information on the potential impacts the proposed project could have as they relate to the topics outlined in this scoping decision, including possible mitigation for identified impacts, identification of irretrievable commitment of resources, and permits from other government entities that may be required.

I. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT
- A. Project Description
- B. Project Purpose
- C. Route Description
  1. Route Width
  2. Right-of-Way
- D. Project Costs

II. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK
- A. Certificate of Need
- B. High Voltage Transmission Line Route Permit
- C. Environmental Review Process

III. ENGINEERING AND DESIGN
- A. Transmission Line Structures
- B. Transmission Line Conductors

IV. CONSTRUCTION
- A. Right-of-Way Acquisition
- B. Construction
- C. Restoration
- D. Operation and Maintenance

V. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT, POTENTIAL IMPACTS, AND MITIGATIVE MEASURES

A. Environmental Setting
B. Socioeconomics
C. Human Settlements
   1. Noise
   2. Aesthetics
   3. Displacement
   4. Property Values
   5. Public Services
      a) Roads and Highways
      b) Utilities
      c) Emergency Services
   6. Electronic Interference
      a) Radio
      b) Television
      c) Wireless Phone / Internet Services
D. Public Health and Safety
   1. Electric and Magnetic Fields
   2. Implantable Medical Devices
   3. Stray Voltage
   4. Induced Voltage
   5. Air Quality
E. Land Based Economies
   1. Agriculture
   2. Forestry
   3. Mining
   4. Recreation and Tourism
F. Archaeological and Historic Resources
G. Natural Environment
   1. Water Resources
      a) Surface Waters
      b) Groundwater
      c) Wetlands
   2. Soils
   3. Flora
   4. Fauna
H. Threatened / Endangered / Rare and Unique Natural Resources
I. Zoning and Land Use Compatibility
   1. Use of Existing Rights-of-Way
J. Adverse Impacts Which Cannot Be Avoided
K. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

VI. ALTERNATIVE ROUTES TO BE EVALUATED IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The route proposed by Xcel Energy in its route permit application will be evaluated in the EA (see attached map). No other routes or route alternatives will be evaluated in the EA.

VII. IDENTIFICATION OF PERMITS

The EA will include a list and description of permits from other government entities that may be required for the proposed project.

ISSUES OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The EA for the Kohlman Lake to Goose Lake project will not consider the following:

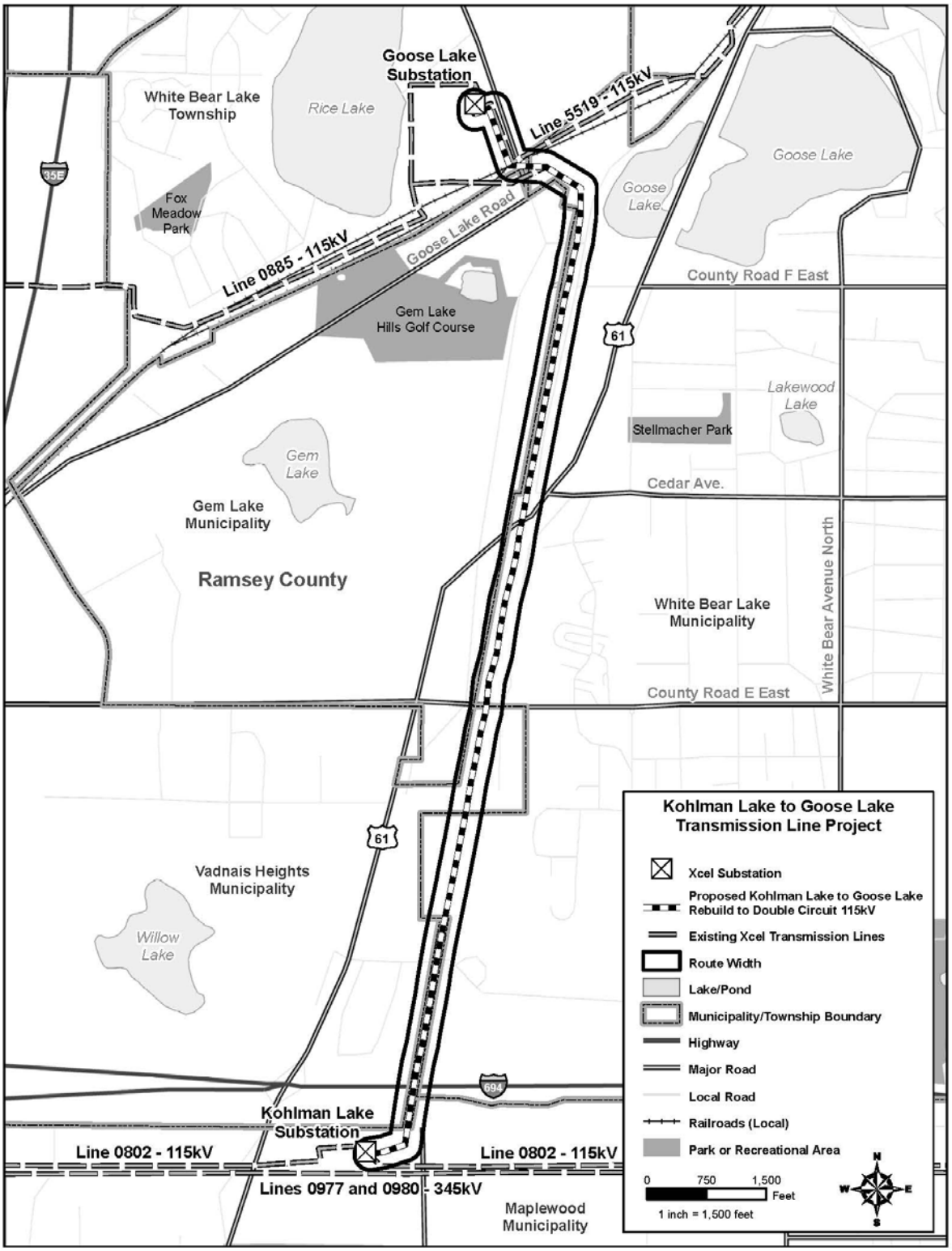
A. No-build alternative.
B. Issues related to project need, size, type, or timing.
C. Any route alternative not specifically identified in this scoping decision.
D. Policy issues surrounding whether utilities or local governments should be liable for the cost to relocate utility poles when roadways are widened.
E. The manner in which land owners are paid for transmission right-of-way easements, as that is outside the jurisdiction of the Commission.

SCHEDULE

The environmental assessment is anticipated to be completed and available in September 2013. A public hearing will be held in the project area after the environmental assessment has been issued and notice served.

Signed this 26th day of June, 2013

STATE OF MINNESOTA
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

William Grant, Deputy Commissioner

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Route to be Evaluated in Environmental Assessment